These abilities are not distinct, but are mutually dependent and integrated facets of listening comprehension. A good listener is one who can respond simultaneously and appropriately to the language, the message, and the style of mature speech. A good listener can achieve these understandings with reasonable ease and fluency; that is, he does not need to stall the speaker with questions to refresh his short term memory, or with requests for repetitions.

Having considered those characteristics of efficient listeners, let us turn our attention to identifying those comprehension stages that a second language learner may go through in developing proficiency in speech comprehension. Rivers (1966) provides some suggestions for stages of comprehension of spoken language:

1. On first contact the second language utterances strike the learner's ear as a stream of undifferentiated sound. The learner cannot tell where one word ends and another begins. He cannot even identify sentence boundaries.

2. The learner gradually perceives some order in the noise. He notes the rise and fall of intonation, breath groups, and similar noises.

3. The learner recognizes familiar elements in a stream of discourse but cannot discern interrelationships of the elements within the stream. The learner may recognize snatches of phrases but really fails to comprehend the message.

4. With exposure to the target language the learner learns to recognize the crucial elements of the message. However at this stage he may not be able to remember what he has heard because the burden of the message is too great for his short term memory. The learner is so busy concentrating on listening that he has no time to rehearse and store away one 'message' before he has to tackle the next one.

5. With much practice the learner passes beyond this stage and into one which he can listen to and evaluate spoken language, and approach the kind of comprehension native speakers enjoy.

It would seem logical, that in certain social situations where the learner enters with prior experience he can transfer to the new context, his comprehension skills may develop further and faster than in other situations. For example, in basic conversational encounters the learner may well have developed skills in the range of stage 5, but in telephone conversations he may still be in a very elementary stage.

Let us turn our attention now to examining techniques for measuring listening comprehension. The techniques considered here have been selected because of their ease in preparation, and use. They are most suited to students in intermediate and advanced stages of acquiring English listening skills.

Objective tests of listening have become popular for their facility and reliability in marking. However, it is often difficult to develop objective tests that reflect the integrative nature of the skills involved in listening comprehension. Furthermore, reliable and valid objective tests require careful preparation and a time committment that teachers often cannot cope with (A study of Oller (1973) and Harris (1969) will reveal the strengths and weaknesses of objective tests of language skills). Two types of objective test items; multiple-choice, and fill-in items, are discussed below.

Appropriate response items come in two varieties. The most common of these is the question stimulus and choice of responses. The item is to be answered by selecting the one most logical answer from the choice of responses.

For example:

The examinee hears:	The examinee reads:
"When did Mr. Jones arrive?"	A. Last week. B. Yes, he did. C. By bus. D. To learn English.

A second variety of appropriate response item uses a conversational statement for the stimulus instead of a question.

For example:

The examinee hears:	The examinee reads:
"I wonder why David is late tonight."	A. Maybe he will be late. B. Yes, he is. C. I do too. D. No, I'm sure he isn't.

Paraphrase answer items are another type of multiple-choice test. In this type of item the examinee hears a statement, then keeps it in mind while he reads four statements, one of which is the best paraphrase of the stimulus statement. For example:

The examinee hears:	The examinee reads:
Mary dropped the newspaper into the fire.	A. Mary burned the paper. B. Mary read the paper. C. Mary delivered the paper. D. Mary threw the paper.

Conversation comprehension items are a more difficult type of multiple-choice item to construct. This type of item uses a dialogue as the oral stimulus, and printed alternative to answer an oral comprehension question which requires comprehension of both speakers, and the context of the conversation. For example:

The examinee hears:		The examinee reads:
Woman:	"I feel like steak tonight. How much are these per pound?"	A. In a butcher shop. B. In a coffee shop. C. In a garage.
Man:	"It's gone up to $2.29, but the pork steaks are only $1.59 per pound."	
3rd Voice:	"Where did this conversation likely take place?"	

The other approach to objective testing requires the examinee to generate answers to fill in a blank with the precise word that completes the utterance he has heard.

The grammar comprehension item developed by Bowen (1975) is an objective, integrative test of listening comprehension that taps the examinee's control of English grammar. In Bowen's test the examinee is asked to identify

and write down the full form of the second word of each sentence he hears. Sometimes the second word is not pronounced distinctly, and at other times it is contracted with another word. If the examinee hears a sentence like "Who's that?" he writes down the full form of the second word which is "is", even though all he heard was the /Z/ on the end of "Who's". In the tapescript Bowen uses some rather innovative spellings to aid the reader in repeating the cue sentences. The following examples may help you understand this item better.

The examinee hears:	The examinee reads:
"Whadja do yesterday?"	did
"Dja finish your work by four o'clock?"	you
"This'n'll do the job all right."	one

Much has been written about using cloze procedure in testing English as a second language (Aitken, (1977) and Oller, (1973)) although little has been said about aural cloze tests in E.S.L. A cloze test is composed of a passage of discourse in which every 7th word (for example) has been deleted. The student reads the passage and fills in the blank with the one word that he thinks fits. In adapting this to an aural test of listening, an unmutiliated version of the test would be presented aurally, while the examinee follows his 'mutilated' copy and completes the blank with the exact word he hears.

A variation of this task that may be more difficult for the examinee would be a cloze passage in which articles, prepositions and pronouns were the only words selected for deletion. Again the examinee hears the entire passage delivered at a normal conversational or oral reading rate, but must catch those critical elements that receive word stress, that is, articles, prepositions and pronouns. Ted Plaister (1976) has developed this approach into a useful set of classroom activities that are of particular value to teachers of E.S.L. for academic purposes in colleges and universities.

His materials could be adapted to other settings, or used as a model for materials relevant to any particular area.

Another variation of the cloze task was developed by Spolsky et al (1968) and is referred to in the literature as the "Noise Test". This cloze technique involves a list of numbered sentences, not necessarily continuous discourse, that are taped. A word, in each sentence is deleted and replaced by some kind of electronic interference "noise". The examinee listens to each sentence then writes down only the words he thinks are missing. For example:

The examinee hears:	The examinee writes:
"Those old shoes have (noise) in the soles."	holes

Johansson (1973) has argued that this technique, and a dictation measure the same thing. Since dictations are easier to construct, he sees little merit in using a noise test.

This leads us out of objective tests as they are normally perceived, into dictation tasks. Dictation as a test of listening comprehension has had its ups and downs in popularity among professional language test writers. After many years of relative unpopularity dictation is now being recognized as an effective diagnostic device for language teachers as well as being an excellent integrative test of overall language proficiency (Oller, 1973). Of course, many of us knew it all the time. Valette (1967) recommends one effective technique for administering a dictation.

> "First, the whole passage is read at normal speed. The students are told not to write, just to listen carefully. The passage is read a phrase at a time, with pauses during which the students write down what they have heard. At this time the teacher may read each phrase either once or twice, as long as he is consistant (At the teacher's discretion, punctuation marks may be given in the target language). Finally, the entire passage is re-read at normal speed, and the students are given a few minutes for final revision. It is imperative that the teacher never repeat a particular phrase at a student's request." p. 140

A fifty-word dictation is brief and can be scored easily assigning a point for each correct word in its correct place.

However, other scoring procedures have been used.

Joan Morley builds her text, Listening Dictations (Morley, 1970), around a modified dictation task that merits careful consideration by E.S.L. teachers. In Morley's dictation task the examinee is given a response sheet upon which he writes each dictated sentence. This sheet tells him the number of words in each sentence. The examinee hears each sentence in its entirety twice. The sentences vary in length and complexity from five-word simple sentences to twenty-seven-word complex two sentence utterances. The sentences in Morley's text are grouped by grammatical similarity but rarely have a common topic. The student hears 12 to 15 sentences per session, followed by a multiple choice task in which the sentences randomly ordered, are given again as the stimulus. The students identify which of three alternatives best fits as either an answer to the stimulus question, or a paraphrase of the stimulus statement. For example:

The examinee hears:	The examinee writes:
"Are they from Mexico?"	Are they from Mexico?
Later, the examinee hears:	The examinee reads:
"Are they from Mexico?"	A. Yes, it is. B. Yes, he is. C. Yes, they are.

A refinement of this I have used successfully is to construct the 15 dictated sentences so as to address a common topic, or better still, to be a continuous text, then using them as the stimulus sentences as Morley does, develop appropriate alternatives to be used in the comprehension task. This integration of two listening items, provides a compact, useful approach in classroom level achievement testing.

The dicto-comp, a technique for controlled composition developed by Robert Ilson (1962) is a modified dictation task that has been used in listening comprehension testing. The selected passage for dictation (about 7-10 sentences long) is read aloud three or four times while the examinee listens

carefully. After the last reading, the examinee writes the passage he has heard. To the extent the examinee writes what he remembers, this is much like a traditional dictation. However, to the extent that the examinee uses context clues to reconstruct the passage filling in memory gaps, this is a controlled composition. It would probably be best to judge this in terms of content accuracy primarily, when using it as a listening test. To construct a marking guide list all the main points of the passage in the order they appear. One might give a mark for each point the student has in his version, plus extra points for correct sequencing, grammar, punctuation, etc. Remember though, that the main point of this is recall of those main points.

Another kind of listening test that might be used is objective, yet quite different from the previously discussed objective tests. It has some similarities to the dicto-comp, but is much easier to mark. For want of a better name, I refer to it as a recall test (see Black, 1974). The examinee listens to a lecturette (a micro-lecture on some relevant topic). This lecturette is interrupted at some point and the examinee is given a list of points, many of them covered so far in the lecturette, but others yet to come. The examinee is asked to identify those points that have already been discussed in the lecturette.

To summarize, I have reviewed some notions regarding the listening comprehension process and identified the various stages in a second language learner's development of listening skills. The balance of the paper has focussed on a variety of practical testing techniques a teacher might use in the classroom to assess language learner's proficiency in comprehending spoken English.

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ABSTRACT

Approaches to measuring listening comprehension that can be used in the classroom by teachers of English as a second language are presented. General abilities needed to comprehend spoken language, and stages that a second language learner may go through in developing proficiency in speech comprehension, are outlined. Techniques for measuring listening comprehension include two types of objective testing items: multiple-choice and fill-in. Multiple-choice formats include: use of question-choice of response, conversational statement-response, dialogue-response, and paraphrase-response. Fill-in formats include the grammar comprehension item developed by Bowen and variations of cloze tests. Examples are presented of the types of objective test items. Dictation tasks for testing listening comprehension are also described and examples are presented. Additionally, a test is described which requires the examinee to recall a lecture by selecting points that had been discussed. (SW)

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MEASURING LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Kenneth G. Aitken, currently on the faculty of the University of Petroleums and Minerals in Saudi Arabia, was formerly with the Evaluation and Research Services of the Vancouver School Board. He has taught ESL to adult immigrants and foreign students in Vancouver, as well as in Hawaii and Utah. He has previously published articles on language testing in the TESOL Quarterly and in the TESL Reporter.

My purpose in this paper is to familiarize teachers of English as a second language with a number of approaches to measuring listening comprehension skills that can be used in the classroom. I will begin by defining listening comprehension and discussing various stages in testing listening comprehension. Finally I will review four dictation techniques and a recall test.

What does it mean to comprehend spoken language? The abilities needed in speech comprehension include at least the following according to Rivers (1966):

1. Understanding a large percentage of the lexical items occuring in non-specialized speech, and being able to guess the meanings of unfamiliar or distorted items from the contexts in which they appear.
2. Understanding the syntactic patterns and morphological forms characteristic of spoken language, and following the longer, more involved, and often rambling streams of oral discourse.
3. Understanding the flow of stressed and unstressed sounds, as well as intonation cues and other cues of oral punctuation.
4. Identifying the speaker's purpose.
5. Drawing correct conclusions and valid inferences about the social situation, speaker's intent, or context of the speech in general.
6. Recognizing the speaker's attitude toward the listener and the subject of their discussion.
7. Identifying the techniques and rhetorical devices by which the speaker conveys his message.

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